One of SPARK's goals is to help match researchers and people who want to participate in their studies. This report includes initial data and information from one of SPARK’s research match studies, which was conducted in the summer of 2017. After the researchers finish analyzing their data, we will share a final report with more details about how SPARK participants are helping to advance autism research!

More research match opportunities will be forthcoming in 2018.

Note – Invitations to participate in research match studies depend on each study’s unique needs. So not every SPARK participant will be invited to join every study. But be assured, you will have many more opportunities to participate in research!
To better understand the complex interactions of genes and environment (before, during, and just after pregnancy) that may cause autism.

Learn more about GEARS’ goals here.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND EARLY STUDY DATA

Child’s birthplace
- Over 1,200 mothers of children enrolled in SPARK, ages 2 to 12 from across the U.S., completed the online GEARS survey. This was a tremendous response – more than 60% of those invited.
- Prior research has shown that some types of environmental exposures and other factors just before and after birth are linked to autism.
- GEARS participants reported their child’s birthplace as part of the survey. The GEARS team will use this information, along with those participants’ genetic and environmental data, to look for potential causes of autism.

Medical problems and complications during pregnancy
- Everything that happens during pregnancy can affect a baby’s growth and development.
- Prior research has shown that medical complications during pregnancy may increase the risk of autism.
- GEARS participants reported many details about their pregnancy. The GEARS team will use this information to look for clues on how these earliest changes in a child’s environment (the womb) may interact with genes and potentially lead to the development of autism.

Parent age at child’s birth
- Children with autism are born to mothers and fathers of all ages.
- Previous studies have shown there may be an increased risk of autism in children born to older parents.
- The GEARS team will look at parent age and genetic factors to better understand how reproductive cells are impacted by environmental exposures over time. This information may help researchers better understand how and when autism develops.

Fever during pregnancy
- 25%

One or more medical problems or pregnancy complications (examples: gestational diabetes, premature labor, high blood pressure)
- 44%
Participant feedback

How important is this topic to you and your family?

4.7 out of 5

How would you rate your experience participating in this study?

4.9 out of 5

From the GEARS team:

Thank you to all of the GEARS participants!

Your family’s information will help us better understand the role of environment and genetics in autism. Also, we appreciate your insightful comments about the study itself, which will help us improve the survey for others.

We look forward to sharing with you a full report of the study when it’s available.

SPARKforAutism.org